

Defense will aid auto technology

By JOSEPH SZCZESNY - July 19, 2011 - The Macomb Daily

Chrysler Group LLC's request for \$2 billion in loans from the U.S. Department of Energy remain on hold for now.

DOE Secretary of Energy Stephen Chu said Monday, "I'm not at liberty to discuss that," after speaking at a conference at Next Energy in Detroit. "We're still working with Chrysler."

Spokeswoman Sean Morgan said Chrysler was continuing to work with the DOE.

Chrysler has been pursuing the loans for more than a year and last week Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow indicated the loans had been approved. However, there was no official confirmation from the DOE or the White House.

The federally guaranteed loans are authorized under the 2007 Energy Act and are specifically designed to finance research and development of new, more efficient vehicles, hybrids and electric vehicles.

The DOE has already approved loans for the Ford Motor Co. and California-based manufacturers of electric vehicles such as Tesla and Fisker.

Chu was in Detroit Monday to announce a new working agreement between the DOE and the U.S. Department of Defense that is designed to expedite the development of more efficient vehicles.

The new DOE-DOD alliance will help advance national security by encouraging the development of new technology and energy-saving resources.

The DOD, as an early adopter and as a consumer, has played a critical role in the development of new technology from aircraft to transistors. The transistor was invented by Bell Labs, but it was money from the Defense Department that helped turn transistors and integrated circuits invented by Texas Instruments into viable commercial propositions.

The new alliance between DOE and DOD, which will also involve civilian automakers and suppliers through the U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research Development and Engineering Center in Warren, can help push the development of vehicles, which use advanced technology.

For example, carbon fiber, which will help make vehicles lighter-weight, is still too expensive to use in civilian automobiles. However, purchases by the military could help reduce the cost of carbon fiber components and move them closer to use in affordable civilian vehicles.

Chu also said he was optimistic about the prospects for electric vehicles. "There is a 50-50 chance that within 10 years we will have an electric vehicle that costs \$20,000 and goes more than 300 miles (on one charge,) he said.

Joseph Westphal, under secretary of the Army, said the cost of fuel has become a major issue for the U.S. Army, which now pays billions of dollars to provide fuel to American soldiers